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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 EB-08
OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 DOE-11 SOE-02 /106 W
----------124208 152005Z /46
R 151829Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4185
SECDEF WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
USMISSION USNATO
USNMR SHAPE
USCINCEUR
USDOCOSOUTH
CINCUSAREUR
CINCUSNAVEUR
CINCUSAFE

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E. O. NA
TAGS: UK MPOL NATO
SUBJECT: SECOND DAY OF DEBATE ON UK DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

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REF: LONDON 4111
SUMMARY: THE OPPOSITION AMENDMENT (REFTEL) WAS REJECTED
BY COMMONS BY A VOTE OF 285 TO 246 GIVING THE GOVERNMENT
A MAJORITY OF 39 VOTES. THE GOVERNMENT MOTION ITSELF
WAS CARRIED BY A MAJORITY OF 30 VOTES, 276 TO 246.
END SUMMARY.

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1. WELLBELOVED (UNDER-SECRETARY FOR THE RAF) OPENED THE SECOND DAY OF DEBATE FOR THE GOVERNMENT BY VIGOROUSLY ATTACKING OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT DEFENSE POLICY. HE ATTACKED THE CONSERVATIVES FOR HAVING ALLOWED BRITAIN'S AIR DEFENSES TO RUN DOWN, OBLIGING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT TO START REBUILDING THEM "FROM SCRATCH." HE ATTACKED THE OPPOSITION FOR ATTEMPTING TO MONOPOLIZE ON "PATRIOTISM" AND SAID IT WAS A TRAGEDY THAT THEY COULD NOT GENERATE EVEN A "FLICKER OF PATRIOTIC PRIDE" TO THROW LIGHT ON THE "VITAL AND SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION" BRITAIN WAS MAKING TO NATO. HE ACCUSED THE OPPOSITION OF CRITICIZING BRITAIN'S DEFENSE EFFORT WITHOUT "A SIMPLE CONSTRUCTIVE ATTEMPT TO DEPLOY THEIR OWN POLICY" FOR EXAMINATION.
2. WELLBELOVED ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE MORALE OF THE ARMED FORCES "WAS NOT ALL THAT HE WOULD LIKE IT TO BE." HE SAID THAT THE FORCES HAD HAD TO SUFFER A FALL IN LIVING STANDARDS AS EVERY OTHER SECTION OF THE COMMUNITY HE ARGUED THAT THE "TOUGH DECISIONS" OF THE PAST FEW YEARS WERE "BEGINNING TO REAP THEIR REWARD" AND THAT THE UK HAD ENTERED A PERIOD OF STABILITY AND MODEST GROWTH IN THE DEFENSE BUDGET WOULD HELP TO IMPROVE MORALE.

3. WELLBELOVED AND CHURCHILL (A CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON DEFENSE) ENGAGED IN A HEATED EXCHANGE WHEN WELLBELOVE
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ACCUSED CHURCHILL OF TRYING TO UNDERMINE THE SERVICES' MORALE BY HIS CONSTANT CRITICISM OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THEIR EFFICIENCY. THE SPEAKER HAD TO INTERVENE AND CHURCHILL WAS OBLIGED TO WITHDRAW HIS USE OF THE WORD "LIE." CHURCHILL THEN SUBSTITUTED HIS GRAND-FATHER'S PHRASE "TERMINOLOGICAL INEXACTITUDE."

4. FOR THE OPPOSITION, VICTOR GOODHEW (A CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON DEFENSE) ATTACKED WELLBELOVED'S SPEECH AS "FRIVOLOUS AND CAVALIER." HE DREW A SOMBRE PICTURE OF THE GROWING WORLDWIDE INFILTRATION AND SUBVERSION BY THE RUSSIANS. RUSSIAN INFLUENCE AND CONTROL WAS GROWING AND GOODHEW ASSERTED THAT IF THE RUSSIANS WERE TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE CAPE SEA ROUTES THEY COULD, BY A STRATEGY OF DENIAL OF ESSENTIAL MINERALS, CRIPPLE WESTERN EUROPE AND "BRING US TO OUR KNEES WITHOUT GIVING A SINGLE SHOT.

5. GOODHEW ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT OVER SERVICE PAY AND HE THOUGHT THIS ISSUE COULD BE THE "BREAKING POINT" FOR MORALE IN THE SERVICES. HE RAISED MULLEY'S UNFORTUNATE SLEEPING EPISODE AT THE RAF'S JUBILEE AIR REVIEW SAYING IT WAS "SYMBOLIC" OF A GOVERNMENT ASLEEP

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AND UNAWARE OF THE DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD, ASLEEP AND UNAWARE OF THE MOUNTING MILITARY
THREAT, ASLEEP AND UNAWARE OF THE DREADFUL DAMAGE THEY
WERE DOING TO THE MORALE OF THE SERVICEMEN, AND ASLEEP
AND UNAWARE OF THE RISKS TO WHICH THEY WERE EXPOSING
THE COUNTRY.

6. CHURCHILL (AN OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON DEFENSE)

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CLOSED THE DEBATE FOR THE CONSERVATIVES BY ATTACKING
THE GOVERNMENT FOR SHOWING ITSELF RESOLVED AND
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DETERMINED NOT "TO DO THE NECESSARY THINGS" TO ENSURE
THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE AND FREEDOM. HE PROMISED
SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED SPENDING ON DEFENSE UNDER A
CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. PAY WOULD BE GIVEN PRIORITY
AND THEY WOULD ACCELERATE AND "WHERE APPROPRIATE"
EXPAND RE-EQUIPMENT PROGRAMS. ALSO, A CONSERVATIVE
GOVERNMENT WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE RESERVES TO MEET
"UNFORESEEN" CONTINGENCIES. BUT, CHURCHILL OBSERVED,
THE OPPOSITION IS DENIED ACCESS TO FACTS, FIGURES AND
EXPERTISE TO PREPARE "A BLUEPRINT AND TO COST IT . . ."

7. GILBERT (MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE) CLOSED THE
DEBATE. AMONG THE POINTS HE INNUMERATED HE NOTED THAT
THE GOVERNMENT WAS TAKING STEPS "AT CONSIDERABLE EXPENSE'
TO IMPROVE POLARIS TO ENABLE THAT SYSTEM TO REMAIN AN
EFFECTIVE COMPONENT OF NATO'S STRATEGIC DETERRENT "FOR
SOME YEARS TO COME."

8. COMMENT: UK DEFENSE WHITE PAPERS HAVE A SOLID
HISTORY FOR BEING BLAND--AND FOR GENERALLY AVOIDING
SERIOUS TREATMENT OF ISSUES WHICH MIGHT IMPACT ON FUTURE
POLICY AND INTENTIONS. THIS YEAR'S WHITE PAPER WAS NO
EXCEPTION--AND THE DEBATE IN COMMONS WAS NOT PARTICULARL
SPIRITED OR EVEN ENLIGHTENING IN TERMS OF DISCLOSING
SPECIFIC DETAILS OF BRITAIN'S DEFENSE POSTURE OR
FUTURE DEFENSE POLICY INTENTIONS. AS WE EXPECTED, THERE
WERE THE USUAL VERBAL FIREWORKS FROM THE LABOR LEFT WHO
CONTINUE TO SHOW THEIR DISAPPROVAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S
INCREASED SPENDING ON DEFENSE. HOWEVER, MUCH OF THIS
HAD THE AIR OF BEING RITUALISTIC. IN FACT, THE OVERALL
MOOD OF THE HOUSE WAS ONE OF FAIRLY SOLID SUPPORT FOR
DEFENSE AND IT APPEARS THAT THE LONG DOWNHILL RUN OF
CUTTING DEFENSE SPENDING HAS COME TO AN END. AN UPWARD
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TURN WILL BE SUSTAINED, WE BELIEVE, IF THE UK'S ECONOMIC
PERFORMANCE CONTINUES TO IMPROVE. CERTAINLY, IT IS
SALUTARY THAT THE OVERALL TENOR OF THE DEBATE UNDER-
SCORED RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF BRITAIN MAINTAIN-
ING--AND PERHAPS EVEN INCREASING--ITS DEFENSE ROLE AND

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CONTRIBUTION TO NATO.
9. CLEARLY, DEFENSE AS A POLITICAL ISSUE IS UNLIKELY TO EMERGE AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. THE DEBATE DID REVEAL, HOWEVER, THAT A VERY SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE HOUSE HAS A REAL SENSE OF THE DANGERS OF REDUCING ANY FURTHER BRITAIN'S DEFENSE CAPABILITIES.

BREWSTER

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